



The Civil Rights movement caused a tremendous upheaval in the U.S. as millions of Blacks rose up against generations of Jim Crow segregation and racial discrimination. In the '60s, as rebellions exploded in hundreds of urban areas and was even more squarely aimed at the imperialist system, the Black liberation struggle became the main force at the time pushing ahead all other struggles against the capitalist rulers.

## What Is the Road Forward?

# Black Liberation: A Mighty Force

The civil rights and Black liberation movements of the '50s and '60s were tremendous struggles involving tens of millions of people. Not since the Civil War had there been an uprising of such social magnitude and force against the oppression of Blacks, with the masses of Black people, joined by significant numbers of whites, battling for democratic rights and an end to the misery and repression they suffered.

Many victories and advances were won in the course of these struggles. They spread a revolutionary spirit among the masses of the American people and were an inspiration and spark for the struggle of other oppressed nationalities in the U.S. and the working class as a whole.

In the '70s there has been an ebb in that massive wave of struggle. Many of the gains won have been snatched back by the rulers of this country and its overall goals, full equality for Blacks and the end to their oppression as a people, have yet to be achieved. Black people, together with other oppressed minorities, are still subjected to "discrimination, the denial of democratic rights, violent police repression, suppression and mutilation of their cultures, exploitation and oppression as members of the working class, with the lowest positions, constantly high unemployment, the lowest paid jobs, the worst housing, the worst of bad health care and other social services." (from the *Programme* of the RCP)

This ebb in the Black liberation movement has not been because the oppression of Black people has been ended or because the masses of Black people have ceased to hate and struggle against it. The struggle for the emancipation of Black people came squarely up against the need for proletarian revolution to emancipate all the people exploited and oppressed by capitalism. Again to quote the *Programme* of the RCP: "The struggle of Black people can and does deal powerful blows to the monopoly capitalists and to the various forms of discrimination and racist trash they foster to make profit and maintain their power. But by itself it cannot end Black people's oppression because the source of this oppression is capitalist rule. The Black people's struggle alone cannot resolve the basic contradiction of capitalism—between the working class and the capitalist class—the contradiction from which all of its evils arise."

### Change from '60s

The struggles of the '50s and '60s helped expose the nature of capitalist rule. With the deepening of the crisis of the capitalist system, bringing intensified attacks by the imperialists on the masses of people of all nationalities, and developing resistance, the battles of Black people today are taking place in a context where it is easier to see how everyone is getting messed over by the same forces, by the same rulers who grow rich off the labor of others and who benefit from keeping people down. Many of the struggles Black people are engaged in today involve workers of all nationalities.

The struggles of the '50s and '60s did open up some opportunities for a few Blacks. More Black people were able to enter professions, larger numbers of Black students were able to get into college and the general economic situation at that time in the country, combined with the bourgeoisie's desire to divert the struggle away

from a revolutionary direction, made it more possible for some Blacks to open small businesses and enterprises. "During this period, the ruling class, panicked by the powerful upsurge of the Black people and bringing down more savage repression against them, also rushed to build up bourgeois and petty bourgeois forces among them to put a brake on their struggle, and lead it into a dead-end. But because this could in no way change the basic conditions of the Black masses, it has mainly served to intensify class contradictions among Black people, as it becomes all the more clear that the Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie cannot lead Black people to liberation." (*Programme* of the RCP)

In an effort to buy off the Black liberation struggle, a lot of money was thrown into poverty programs and an effort was made to build up some Black politicians. Some of these programs, which were won through bitter struggle, did improve conditions for some Black people temporarily, and for a while they seemed to hold open the possibility of new opportunities. But on the whole, the conditions of life for the masses of Black people have gotten worse.

For instance, while the standard of living of working people overall has been under attack, the average Black family income fell from 62% of the average white family income in 1970 to 58% in 1974. Black unemployment has been twice that of whites. Housing is becoming a bigger problem for all working people, growing more expensive and harder to find. Ghetto stores, services, and housing add up to \$1000 a year more for a Black worker than a white with the same paycheck. And for the majority of Blacks there is increasingly

less hope for escaping the ghetto as housing becomes more segregated every year and in most cities the ghettos are getting more crowded and broken down.

In the drive to protect and maximize their profits the capitalists are forced to cut back on all areas of expenditures that benefit the masses of people, and to step up their exploitation of the working class. The capitalist crisis has meant that their ability to spend money to cool out struggle has greatly diminished. The ability for some Blacks to get a little better deal by becoming professionals or going into business has by and large proved to be a limited and temporary phenomena, while in general it is increasingly difficult for others to follow in their footsteps. And many of those who made an advance in their standard of living are being pushed back down.

### Sharp Questions

These developments and the continued oppression of Blacks has given rise to some sharp questions. What is the cause of this oppression and how can it be ended? Who are the real friends of Black people in their struggle for emancipation and who are their enemies? Most people recognize that when people of different nationalities get together to fight they have a lot more strength and ability to win and most people would like to see such unity between Black and white, but can it happen and if so how?

There are a lot of people around to put forward phoney answers to these questions. First and foremost is the bourgeoisie and their open spokesmen.

According to the line they run, slavery and racial discrimination are a terrible thing, but they are due to the selfishness and corruption of human nature. They claim that great advances have been made, because most of the legal barriers that kept Blacks down have been removed. According to them, Blacks can now make it—if they want to and work hard at it. The only limits to Black achievement, according to the capitalists, the only real obstacles, are the racism of white people, particularly white workers, and the lack of motivation and perseverance on the part of Blacks. In other words, the oppression of Black people is on the one hand the fault of Blacks themselves, and on the other, the fault of whites.

The *Programme* of the RCP takes on these lies and exposes the material basis for the oppression of Blacks in the U.S.: "... the ruling class cannot afford to give up the superprofits it has wrung from the labor of Black people. So today, with the history of Black people's oppression as the foundation, the imperialists have built up a structure of oppression of Black people to fit the new conditions. This oppression hits all classes of Black people, though it is rooted in and is maintained fundamentally for the purpose of enforcing the super-exploitation of Black workers."

At the same time they try to pit people to fighting against one another for a diminishing share of the pie. The capitalist system has long since entered a stage of stagnation and decay. The organization of society on the basis of capitalist relations of production resulted in a life that people in earlier stages of society could not dream of. But the rise of capitalism brought new suffering and exploitation for the masses of people as well, and its continued existence holds back the further development of society to a stage where production and the use of nature will not be based on the exploitation of man by man.

Wracked by continual upheavals and the anarchy of production, capitalism can offer no real, long-term advances in the conditions of life of the masses of people. To the extent that the capitalists are able to engineer temporary upswings in the economy or limited bursts of

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# Mighty Force...

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prosperity, the steps they take only lay the basis for worse crises.

On the international scale, as they maneuver to get some advantage over their rival capitalists in the cut-throat competition that goes on between them, it has led to inter-imperialist wars where workers of different countries have been forced to fight and kill one another for the profits of the capitalists. And it always means greater exploitation of the working class and increased national oppression, of the people of the underdeveloped countries of the world as well as Blacks and other minority nationalities in the U.S.

## Capitalism the Source of Division

There is no denying that there are many divisions between Blacks and whites in the U.S. But the basis for this is the capitalist system itself, which requires the capitalists to rip off and grow rich on the labor of the working class. In pushing down the whole class, they maintain particularly heavy exploitation of Black workers, keeping them at the bottom, using them as a reserve of cheap labor while maintaining the systematic discrimination against all Black people.

The capitalists keep Blacks and whites divided in order to get them to focus their struggles at each other and to keep the class as a whole weak and divided. Among white workers, they promote myths and racist ideology which say that Blacks are inferior and not fit to live with whites and don't want to unite with whites. Because Blacks are forced to live in overcrowded ghettos, for example, in the most run-down and dilapidated buildings, because the city governments often don't even bother to clean the streets or pick up the garbage in many areas of the ghettos, because there is tremendous unemployment and poverty in the ghettos and banks refuse home improvement loans and slumlords refuse to make repairs, they say to white workers, "Look at how these people live!" They imply that whites are better than Blacks and that Blacks have "no desire to improve themselves."

At the same time they try to get over among Blacks by promoting narrow nationalism, saying that whites have no interests in ending the oppression of Blacks and that in fact they benefit from it. This narrow nationalism, "my nationality first," pushes Black people to see whites as responsible for their oppression, to ignore the fact that the masses of Black and white people are confronted by the same enemy and to turn their anger against whites, especially white workers, to fight them over the crumbs the capitalists throw out. Narrow nationalism leads to struggling around things that do not even get at the heart of the real cause of the oppression of Blacks.

But while narrow nationalism and white chauvinism (racism) are flip sides of the same bourgeois outlook, white chauvinism is the main obstacle among the masses to exposing the common enemy of Blacks and white workers and building a unified struggle against it, because it leads directly to uniting with the ruling class in maintaining the system of national oppression that enslaves the masses of Black people.

In the context of worsening conditions and in the course of struggle against continuing attacks against Blacks, numbers of Blacks, primarily from the petty bourgeoisie, seeing their hopes of "making it" fade, are radicalized and come forward in the name of fighting oppression. Some of these people, who were able to make some advances in the past, have taken up a subjective and self-serving line and aim the main thrust of their attacks against whites. They are essentially defeatist, both around waging the struggle against the real enemy and around building unity among Blacks and

white workers.

## Pan Africanism

One of the forms this takes is Pan Africanism, which has attracted some politically active Blacks who argue that Blacks in the U.S. are an "African people" and should consider their struggle as part of the struggle in Africa, which should be the central focus for people of African descent worldwide. (For a fuller treatment of Pan Africanism see "Communism Not Pan Africanism Is the Guide to Socialist Revolution and Black Liberation," by John Henry, in *The Communist*, Theoretical Journal of the Central Committee of the RCP, Vol. 1, No. 2.)

This Pan Africanist line takes into account the common roots in Africa shared by Blacks in the U.S. and it seeks to solve the question of who are the allies of the Black struggle in the U.S. by pointing to people who share these ancestral roots everywhere. But it ignores the real material differences that separate Black people in the U.S. from the various African peoples—differences of language, culture, historical development—and denies the objective unity U.S. Blacks have with workers of other nationalities as part of a single U.S. working class.

It ignores the material facts that make it plain that people of African descent throughout the world are not one nation in any sense of the word that has any scientific meaning. It ignores the fact that Black people in America, kidnapped from various tribes and areas in Africa during the 16th and 17th centuries and brought to America as slaves, developed into a distinct and separate nation of people after the Civil War, during Reconstruction and its betrayal by the Northern bourgeoisie in alliance with the old aristocracy of the South. In their great majority Black people were chained to the land as sharecroppers in the Black Belt area of the South (the old plantation area, which got the name "Black Belt" because of the color of the soil), excluded from the mainstream development of the rest of society and segregated by Jim Crow laws and systematic terror and violence. In this way Black people in the U.S. were forced into a course of national development that was different from the rest of U.S. society as well as obviously different from the peoples of Africa.

But this does not deter Pan Africanists who, despite their claims to oppose imperialism, actually deny its objective effects. They even deny the reality that black people in Africa have not developed as one nation, but numerous nations, based largely on the colonial division of Africa over decades of imperialist domination.

From these real differences of development flow very different conditions of struggle. The people of Africa face struggle principally against neocolonialism and white minority rule. For the countries and peoples of Africa the main immediate objective is national liberation and independence. For Black people in the U.S., who face both oppression as a people and exploitation as members of a single multinational working class, the immediate objective of struggle is the overthrow of the U.S. capitalist ruling class and the establishment of socialism. And the struggle against national oppression takes place in this context.

## Part of One Working Class

Beginning after World War 1 and accelerating after the Second World War, the conditions of exploitation and oppression of Blacks were radically transformed. Southern agriculture was increasingly mechanized and many sharecroppers were driven off the land to become wage laborers in the industrial cities of the North and the South. This transformation didn't mean that Black people had achieved equality or that their oppression had ended, any more than the previous transition from slavery to sharecropping did. But it did mean that Blacks became, in their vast majority, part of the U.S. working class, though still facing the whole system of national oppression, discrimination in hiring, on the job and in all aspects of life.

As the RCP Programme states: "The tens of millions of these nationalities who suffer discrimination and other forms of oppression as peoples are, in their great majority, workers, part of the single U.S. proletariat. Their fight for equality and emancipation is bound by a thousand links with the struggle of the working class for socialism, and lends it great strength."

Pan Africanists like Stokely Carmichael, once an activist in the civil rights movement, argue that this is false and that attempts to build the unity of Black and white to fight national oppression cannot happen, at least not at this point, and lead nowhere. Instead he calls on Black people in the U.S. to struggle to go back to Africa and to make the main focus of their struggle support for the people of Africa. But how the hell are Blacks and white workers going to be united around the demand Blacks go back to Africa? About the only people he will unite around demands like these among the white masses are reactionary and backward elements who would like to see Blacks go anywhere—Africa, the Black Belt, or the moon. Anywhere that is, that would further divide the working class.

This line is not taken seriously among the broad masses of Black people, but it has gained some influence as the Black liberation movement in this country ebbed and the liberation movement in Africa exploded into massive proportions, dealing mighty blows to the imperialists and their allies and offering fresh inspiration to the struggling people everywhere. Within the U.S. it has led to an upsurge of interest in Africa and a militant and growing support for the African liberation movements.

In essence Pan Africanism limits the revolutionary potential of the Black liberation movement by drawing people's attention away from the real basis of national oppression and class exploitation suffered by the masses of Blacks. And it not only turns people's eyes away from the struggle here, it even obscures the key way Blacks and whites in the U.S. can give real support to the liberation struggles in Africa: by exposing and fighting the U.S. imperialists who oppress the people of the U.S. and the peoples of Africa.

## Self-Determination Main Thrust?

Another line that has surfaced to misdirect and create obstacles for the struggle of Black people for liberation puts forward that the main thrust of their struggle is and should be for self-determination, the right to form a separate country in the Black Belt area of the South. These people, usually found in various dogmatist and reformist groups calling themselves revolutionaries and "communists," try to base themselves on the fact that Black people are a nation and that this nation was forged and its people once lived primarily in the Black Belt. They too try to distract people from the real basis and conditions of the struggle.

The Revolutionary Communist Party upholds the right of self-determination for Black people, the right to establish their own independent state, which is a key aspect of equality among nations, in order to unite workers of all nationalities in the common struggle against imperialism. Black people were formed into a nation, and though now dispersed, that nation has not been eliminated and the right to self-determination in their historic Black Belt homeland in the U.S. remains.

But the RCP does not advocate such separation now or under foreseeable circumstances, and to do so now would be to advocate a step backwards. That does not rule out the possibility that such advocacy might become necessary for the development of the proletarian revolution. But support for a national movement for self-determination is contingent on whether it helps to weaken and overthrow imperialism. And it is certainly not the main demand raised by the masses of Black people today.

The fact that the demand for self-determination is not the central thrust of Black people's struggle today reflects the fact that the majority of Blacks are workers, scattered from the Black Belt and concentrated in cities across the U.S. where they daily face discrimination, violence and exploitation. The demands of the Black masses are those that arise from this situation. The answer to these demands is not some updated call for "40 acres and a mule" in the South, but proletarian revolution and socialism and fighting to end national oppression and inequality in that context.

The road forward to Black liberation and the struggle of the whole working class for emancipation are indissolubly linked together. But the development of this unity in struggle against the common imperialist enemy will not happen spontaneously or automatically. At each stage of the struggle the working class and its Party must isolate the main enemy to the greatest possible degree and unite all who can be united against it.

The material basis for building the unity of struggle is that all exploitation and oppression stems from the same source: the capitalist system, and, still more, the fact that the majority of Black people are members of a single, multinational U.S. working class.

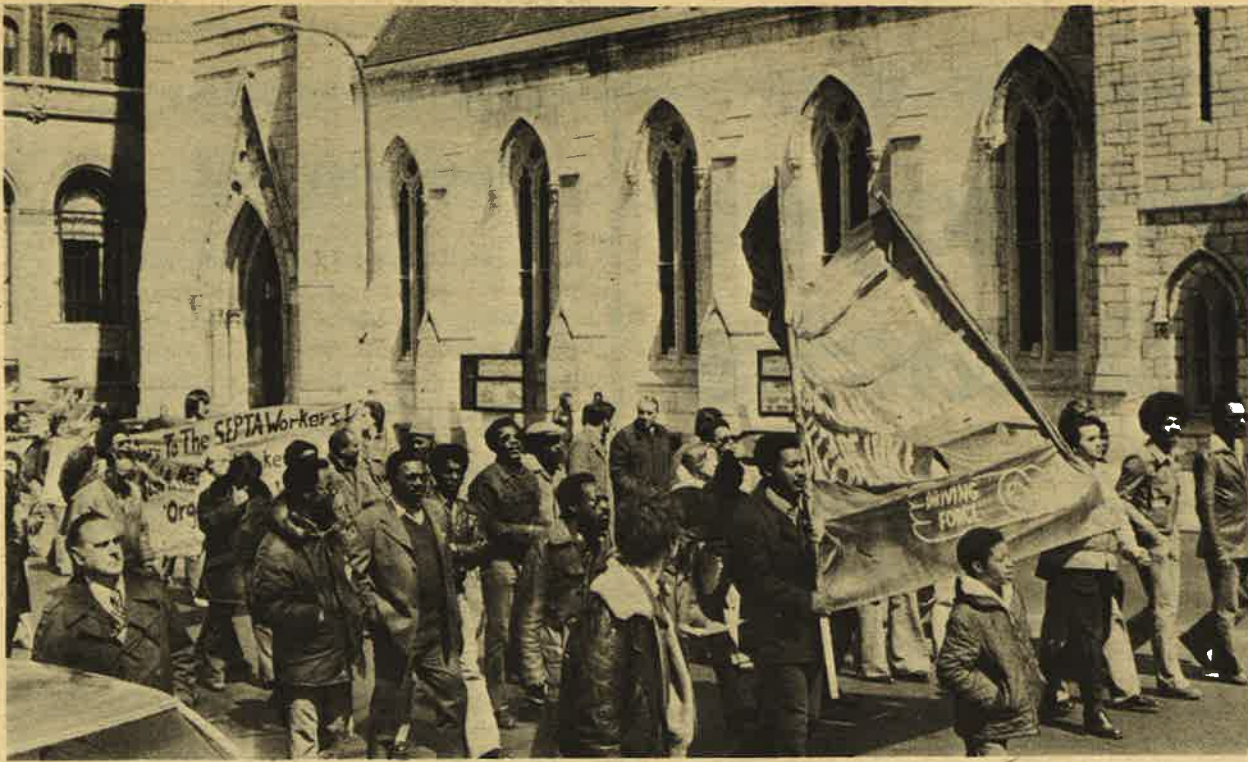
## Unity Built Through Struggle

The ruling class recognized this potential for a powerful revolutionary alliance between the masses of op-



From the beginning the struggle of oppressed nationalities has been closely linked with the overall class struggle. Today that link can be forged all the more firmly because Blacks are, in the main, members of the single U.S. working class, together with workers of all nationalities.

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Philadelphia, April 9—In a demonstration called by Driving Force and receiving community support, members of the Transportation Workers Union march demanding: A Decent Contract, Restore All Cuts in Services, No Fare Hikes!

## Workers Go Back Bitter, Determined

# 43 Day SEPTA Strike Sabotaged

In early May workers for the South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) voted to end their strike. They had held out for 43 days, five thousand strong, against the combined forces of SEPTA, Philadelphia's notorious Mayor Rizzo, the Philly capitalists acting under the signboard of the Chamber of Commerce, and the treachery of their own union officials. But after one and a half months on strike, the majority of workers, members of the Transport Workers Union—by a vote of 2129 to 1592—felt that they could no longer continue the battle at this time.

Workers are near unanimous in denouncing the contract which doesn't keep up with inflation, bring back the laid off workers or do anything about the high pressure working conditions. While the defeat of the strike is a setback for the SEPTA workers, no one can take away from them the strength they displayed in struggle, the blows they dealt the capitalists of Philadelphia, or the growing unity and organization forged in the course of the strike. They went back to work bitter but determined. As one old-timer put it the night the contract passed, "This is only the beginning."

The strike began in March when the rank and file smashed through a sellout plan agreed upon by SEPTA, Rizzo and their union "representatives" with a resounding *No* vote that beat the contract by over 800 votes. Impetus for the *No* vote came from the Committee for a Decent Contract (CDC) and Driving Force, an ongoing rank and file organization that had been involved in leading many of the battles of SEPTA workers and helped to initiate the CDC. (See article, *Revolution*, May 1977, p. 7)

From the beginning the strike hit hard at SEPTA and the whole class of exploiters in Philadelphia. Down-

town merchants had their business slashed 50 to 70%, the strikers cost the City millions of dollars and neutralized the threat of a court injunction by their militance. And from the beginning the authorities in Philly attacked the strike with a vengeance.

The capitalists tried every trick in the book to demoralize the strikers and try to divide the transit workers off from the rest of the people of Philadelphia. There was even national TV coverage that accused the SEPTA workers of being overpaid and blamed them for everything from the decline of downtown to the energy crisis (because of the increase in auto traffic!).

In the face of these attacks the union officials sat on their hands. They talked out of one side of their mouths that "we're standing firm" while waiting for the rank and file to be starved back to work. This sabotage was one of the biggest weapons in the hands of the enemy. The head of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce put it this way: "We see this as a chance to draw the line because the union is divided." It was divided all right—between the rank and file who wanted to fight and the leadership that didn't.

### Rank and File Stands Up

A demonstration initiated by Driving Force united some community groups and others behind the strike and pointed the finger of blame directly at the authorities for the strike and the deterioration of the public transportation. Two weeks later, rank and file anger was mounting so sharply that the union leadership was forced to endorse a car caravan called by the rank and file drivers from one depot. The caravan of 70 cars tied up traffic all along the main streets, then parked

white workers was built in the course of mighty struggle. The working class, led by the Communist Party when it was a revolutionary party of the working class, took up the fight against discrimination, against lynching and other terror the capitalists used against Black people in the North and the South.

In the famous case of the Scottsboro boys in the '30s, nine Black youths falsely accused of raping two white women, a struggle was built which became a symbol of the national oppression to which Blacks were subjected to. Hundreds of thousands of white workers, themselves suffering from the blows of the great Depression, rallied under the leadership of the CP to demand their freedom.

Today as millions are being drawn into struggle against the capitalists, and millions more are certain to come forward to fight for their lives, their families and their future, this revolutionary alliance between the struggles of Blacks and other oppressed minorities and the working class movement as a whole will be built through the course of struggle, based on people's common experience of exploitation and oppression and the work of class conscious revolutionaries. These struggles are bound to merge. It is in this way that the proletariat as a whole and the masses of Black people will, at long last, win complete emancipation. ■

## Mighty Force...

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pressed Black people and the working class as a whole and they do everything in their power to drive a wedge between these struggles. But their system forces them to plant their boot ever harder on the necks of the people. As the crisis of their system worsens they are less and less able to bribe or buy off sections of the people. More and more people are brought into struggle against them and, as this happens, it becomes more obvious that it is the same forces that are responsible for the oppression of Blacks and the exploitation of the working class.

Building the fight against national oppression as part of the overall class struggle requires working "from two sides." This involves mobilizing the masses of Black people in the fight against their oppression and mobilizing the working class as a whole to take up this fight. In the process the working class and its Party must bring forward its own ideology and its common interest in fighting to end all oppression and exploitation.

Historically in the U.S. unity between Blacks and

three lanes wide around city hall forcing the police to try futilely to rerout traffic in the center of town. 250 union members marched around City Hall calling the mayor out, forcing the mayor to concede to sending his right-hand man to the negotiating table.

Union President LeDonne was forced to call a mass march on City Hall three days later. Angry workers made him change the time of the march from 9 AM to 7 AM so they could tie up rush hour traffic. By all of a sudden acting militant the union officials were able to reassert some control over the strike they had tried to prevent in the first place.

But LeDonne's backbone was shown to be jelly when Rizzo confronted him in the lobby of the Sheridan Hotel, over a caravan and the proposed march. LeDonne went running after him to apologize and cancelled the march. He had stuck his head a little way out of Rizzo's back pocket and the mayor shoved it back in.

The rank and file reacted with disgust at this act of spinelessness and the failure of the union officials to take up other tasks like building a strike fund (they even refused money offered by other unions). But while many rank and file workers responded to this treachery with more determination to build the fight, the overall effect of this, coupled with divisive activities of some opportunists aspiring to union office who tried to red-bait Driving Force and CDC, was to disorganize the struggle. For these reasons the rank and file was unable to carry through with the march after the union hacks had caved into Rizzo and stabbed it in the back.

Many of the workers who voted to return to work did so because, as some put it, "we've got to regroup, throw out the old union leadership and vote in some new guys who will be in a better position to fight." But while the upcoming union elections will be an important field of struggle and plans are underway for a rank and file slate, Driving Force has stressed the importance of not tying the struggle of the rank and file to the outcome of the election or relying on individual leaders.

SEPTA workers took some great steps forward in taking matters into their own hands and waging a blow for blow struggle against the enemy inside and outside of their union. No matter how hard the bosses try to sum up the strike as a dead loss, the workers can see the growing unity that grew up in the battle to vote down the contract and in the strike itself. Before the strike workers knew only those in their same depot. Only the hacks in union office had contact throughout the SEPTA system. Now ties have been built between workers in different locations. Fighters have stepped forward and have identified each other.

SEPTA workers have also gained new insight into the nature of the enemy they fight. SEPTA workers saw how their enemy is organized far beyond the confines of one company or even one city, how that enemy is backed up by the politicians and the press. In the course of this important battle many workers have come to see the need for the working class to organize and stand together, across industry lines and nationwide, as well as continuing to organize within their industry.

In this spirit, some SEPTA workers joined with Driving Force to participate in the May Day march. SEPTA workers are also taking up the call to form a national workers organization.

The SEPTA strike was an important face-off between the workers and those who profit from their labor. It ended in a temporary defeat, but the sense of strength and common cause that grew in the last few months has not been eradicated and is bound to reassert itself. ■



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